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## The Gospels in the - - Early Church.



By

FREDERIC G. KENYON, M.A., D.Litt.,

Assistant Keeper of Manuscripts, British Museum.

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# **The Gospels in the Early Church**

BY

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## THE GOSPELS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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TEN years ago it would have been necessary to begin a discussion of this subject with an elaborate examination of the dates of the four Gospels. The last echoes were then still ringing of the controversy initiated by Ferdinand Baur in various writings published between 1830 and 1860, in which he maintained that all the Gospels were the product of post-Apostolic ages, beginning with St. Matthew's Gospel about A.D. 130, and ending with St. John's about 170. For something like half a century the controversy was waged with much learning and earnestness on either side. For half a century the evidence was slowly accumulated and brought to bear, which showed that the canonical narratives of the life of Christ could not be placed outside the first century; and it is a legitimate cause of satisfaction to Englishmen that some of the soundest work in this direction — work which combined profound learning with sane historical judgment — was done by two English scholars, Lightfoot and Sanday. At last, within the closing decade of the century, the opposite view was abandoned by all except a few extremists, whom sound scholars, not less than partisan theologians,

agree to ignore. Baur's treatise on the origin of the Gospels was published in 1847; and in 1897 this phase of the controversy was closed by the declarations of Prof. Harnack, the greatest living ecclesiastical historian, and the leading representative of German historical criticism: "In the whole of the New Testament there is probably but one single writing [2 Peter] which can be described as pseudonymous in the strictest sense of the word. . . . The chronological framework in which tradition has arranged the documents from the Pauline Epistles to Irenaeus is in all essential points correct. . . . The time is near at hand when critics will trouble themselves little about questions of literary history in relation to early Christianity, because the essential accuracy of tradition, with few noteworthy exceptions, will be universally admitted."\*

Another distinguished German scholar, Prof. Blass, in applying to the criticisms of the Gospels and Acts the principles of classical scholarship, of which he is one of the most brilliant and original exponents, brushes aside as quite trivial the elaborate arguments of those who maintain that the Christian books are other than they appear on their faces to be. He finds in them simplicity and coherence, and an entire appearance of good faith; and though he is quite prepared to examine and criticise them as freely and fully as any other historical work of human brains, he sees no sort of reason to doubt that they are the products of the age and

\* *The Chronology of Early Christian Literature*, vol. I. pp. viii-xi.

authors to which early tradition unanimously assigned them. With these authorities before us (and I have quoted German scholars, because German scholarship is generally supposed in this country to be free of all prepossessions, and especially of all prepossessions in favour of tradition and orthodoxy) we may fairly dismiss questions of chronology, and accept the Gospels on the footing on which Christian tradition has always placed them, as records of the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, written by certain of His followers (eye-witnesses, or the intimate friends of eye-witnesses, of the events they recorded) before the end of the first century. On this basis we may proceed to inquire more closely into the conditions under which they came into circulation, and their reception into the Christian community.

For some years after the Ascension no necessity would have arisen for a written record of the Lord's life. The events would be fresh in the minds of those who had seen them, and the Christian society had not outgrown the numbers which these eye-witnesses could themselves instruct. Nevertheless, during this first period there must have been some uniformity about the instruction which was given to proselytes. Certain events—the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the fulfilment of prophecy, the miracles of healing—formed the staple of it; we find them in the sketches given in the Acts of the first preachings of Peter, Stephen, and Paul. The essence of the Christian message prescribed a certain amount of the teaching, and experience no doubt

showed which incidents took most hold on an audience, or formed the most effective nucleus for spiritual truths. The first stage is thus one of oral instruction, but of oral instruction which tends to fall into a certain mould and to crystallise into tradition.

For a time—we cannot say precisely how long—this would suffice; but as the Church grew, the necessity for a written record would increase. The Apostles and other eye-witnesses could not be everywhere; moreover, they were becoming old men. Prudence would suggest that their teaching should be committed to writing, so that it might be sent to communities which they had not been able to visit, or be left behind them after their missionary labours had called them elsewhere, and might survive them after their death. But what form would this record take? We have two means of answering the question: probability and early traditions. Probability suggests two alternative forms, suitable for different circumstances. The record might either be one of the external facts of the Lord's life, with merely an indication of His teaching; or it might be a collection of His sayings, with brief indications, where necessary, of the circumstances which gave rise to them. In all likelihood, the former kind of record came first. In addressing hearers ignorant of Christ's teaching, the first necessity was to convince them that His message deserved attention. His miracles, His death, followed by the crowning miracle of His Resurrection, to which the apostles could bear personal testimony, would establish this



claim : the message of repentance, the morals of the simpler parables, would follow on the impression thus produced. Only when His authority as a teacher was established would collections of His sayings be prized.

The evidence of early tradition seems to confirm the suggestions of probability. The addresses to the Jewish audiences, of which the summaries are given in the first chapters of the Acts, follow these lines. They sketch His life, they emphasise the Crucifixion and Resurrection, they summarise His teaching as a call to repentance. However low you rate the historical value of the first part of the Acts, the very least that can be said of it is that it represents what the author, a companion of the greatest missionary apostle, regarded as the natural teaching of a Christian missionary. Again, modern scholarship is practically unanimous in regarding the Gospel of St. Mark as the earliest of the extant records, and as embodying, with little or no change, the earliest written narrative of the life of Christ; and that Gospel is pre-eminently a record of incidents, of miracles, of parables, and of the main events of His life from the Baptism to the Resurrection. Nor is it merely an assumption that this represents in the main the teaching of the apostles themselves. We have the definite assertion of early tradition in support of it. Papias, a contemporary and companion of Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, who had made diligent inquiry about the discourses of the apostles and other disciples of the Lord, quotes the following words of one of them, John the Elder, with regard

to St. Mark's Gospel: "Mark, becoming the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the sayings or doings of Christ. He did not himself hear the Lord, nor did he follow Him; but afterwards, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teachings to the needs of his hearers, without pretending to give a systematic account of the Lord's words."

In St. Mark's Gospel, then, according both to a tradition which reaches back to the first century and to the general opinion of modern scholarship, we have an approximate representation of the oral teaching of the earliest days; and it either embodies, or itself is, one of the earliest written records in which that teaching took permanent form. But it is not the only form in which the teaching of the Lord was embodied. Records of the great outlines of the Lord's life—the Baptism, the preaching of repentance, the signs and wonders, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection—would soon need to be followed by collections of His sayings, both in the form of single pregnant utterances and in more extensive discourses. Here again we have the evidence both of ancient tradition and of concrete facts. The same Papias whom we have already quoted with regard to St. Mark ascribes to St. Matthew a collection of sayings in the Hebrew tongue, which evidently were single utterances or addresses of a more or less oracular character, without historical setting or explanation, since he goes on to say that "everyone interpreted them to the best of

his own ability." This of course does not correspond to the Gospel according to St. Matthew as we now have it, since it is not in Hebrew and does not consist solely of sayings and discourses. There is a great deal of matter in common between St. Matthew's Gospel and St. Mark's, while a good deal is peculiar to the former (or shared by him with St. Luke); and this peculiar element consists largely of discourses. Hence the modern theory is that the author of the first Gospel had before him both St. Mark's work, which is mainly narrative, and a collection of discourses or sayings, which may or may not be the work attributed by Papias to St. Matthew.\*

For St. Luke's Gospel we have no tradition preserved to us by Papias, but we have something more valuable, in his own preface to his work. In that he informs us that many narratives of the Lord's life had already been put forth, narratives which he describes as ordered expositions of the traditions handed down by the original eye-witnesses. With the authors of these narratives he associates himself, undertaking to write down in order the events which he has followed carefully from the beginning. An analysis of his Gospel shows that a large part of its

\* It has been pointed out by Sir J. C. Hawkins (*Horæ Synopticae*, 1899), and more fully by Mgr. A. S. Barnes (*Journal of Theological Studies*, vi. 187, 1905) that the discourses which are the special feature of St. Matthew's Gospel form five groups (v.-vii., x. 5-42, xiii. 3-52, xviii. 3-35, xxiv. 3, xxv. 46), all ending with the formula "and it came to pass when Jesus had finished these sayings (or parables)"; hence it is suggested that these five discourses are in fact the sayings (or oracles) of the Lord upon which Papias wrote a commentary in five books, and the compilation of which he apparently assigns to St. Matthew.

narrative is identical with the matter common to St. Matthew and St. Mark; a phenomenon which was formerly explained by the theory that all three evangelists had made independent use of a common document, but which is now generally attributed to the use of St. Mark's work by the two later writers. St. Luke appears also to have had access to St. Matthew's second main source, the collection of discourses; and he must also have had independent sources of information, as, for example, in his long narrative of the journey through Samaria (ix. 51-xviii. 34). In short, he made use of the labours of his predecessors, to whom he refers in his preface; but what exactly they were, and precisely how he used them, we can never know, since most of them have irretrievably perished. The *general* relations of the three Synoptic Gospels, according to modern scholarship, are substantially as we have here summarised them; as to the details scholars still differ, and certainty is unattainable. The discussion of the "synoptic problem" is for specialists a sufficient topic for lengthy argument; but for our present subject this brief outline of its main features will suffice to show us something of the conditions under which our existing Gospels came into being.

The Fourth Gospel stands apart as a thing by itself, and furnishes, like the Synoptists, sufficient materials for discussion to specialists, who, moreover have not arrived at an equal measure of agreement in their results. The strength of the arguments for St. John's authorship cannot be realised unless they are set forth at length, for which this is

not the place. For our present purpose it is sufficient to point out that it is the latest of the four canonical Gospels, evidently presupposing the existence of the other three, not embodying their substance (as St. Luke, for example, embodied the substance of St. Mark), but assuming and supplementing it, and giving in general a different tone to the teaching which it reports. Of this Gospel (to put the matter at its lowest) the early Church believed St. John to be the author, and, as we shall see presently, its authority was established as early as that of the other three, in the first half of the second century. Whatever opinions be held as to its authorship and character, the traditional date of its origin, about the end of the first century, cannot be far from the truth.

By that date, then, and under the circumstances which we have briefly summarised, our four canonical Gospels were in existence; but the picture is not complete if we close it at this point. It is not to be supposed that they yet formed the only authorised record of the Lord's life and teaching. They existed, not as a single work in four parts, in comparison with which no other record had any authority, but as four separate works circulating probably in different parts of the world, and surrounded by other writings, which, just as much as they, claimed to narrate the Lord's life upon earth. The books of that day were rolls of papyrus of very moderate extent, one of which would not contain more than one of these Gospels. No one could

possess the four Gospels in a single book; and probably few Christian communities possessed all the four books at all. There was no particular reason why they should. The Church had not yet selected these four as specially authoritative above all others; and a church or an individual that owned a copy of St. Luke's Gospel, for example, might reasonably think it unnecessary to have also the shorter Gospel of St. Mark. The slightly greater age of the latter would be no recommendation then, while the greater fullness of the former would render it more desirable. So much was this the case that, humanly speaking, the Gospel of St. Mark appears to have run great risk of perishing altogether. That, at least, seems to be the most probable explanation of the circumstances connected with the last twelve verses of the book as we now have it. Those verses, as is well known, do not occur in several of the oldest manuscripts and versions of the New Testament, and in style and language they are very different from the rest of the Gospel. Either, then, St. Mark was obliged, by death or some other sudden accident, to leave his narrative within a few sentences of its completion, which hardly seems likely, or the end was lost through the mutilation of one copy, and could not subsequently be replaced. That implies, either that very few copies were ever written of the Gospel, or that most of them were allowed to perish, being regarded as superseded by the fuller narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke; so that when the Church subsequently awoke to the value of this earliest life

of the Lord, it was impossible to find a perfect copy, and the end had to be supplied from other sources. What these other sources were, we do not know for certain; but an early Armenian manuscript attaches to the last twelve verses the name of "Ariston," which is generally taken to mean Aristion (the two names were often confused), who is known to us through Papias as one of the disciples of the Lord, and consequently a competent witness to the course of events after the Resurrection.

But besides these four Gospels, the Christian of the end of the first century or the beginning of the second had other sources of information which his individual taste might lead him to prefer. There were other narratives in existence, as St. Luke's prologue implies, and as we know from other sources. There was a Gospel known as "The Gospel according to the Hebrews," written in Hebrew, which was especially preferred by the Jewish Christians, and which in many respects cannot have been far removed from our Synoptic Gospels. It contained, among other things, an incident of a woman who was a sinner, and who was brought and accused before the Lord; and it is supposed that this is the story which we now read in John vii. 53—viii. 11, but which by universal consent does not belong to that place, nor to that Gospel at all. This Gospel was known to and used by Origen, and at a later date was translated by Jerome into Greek and Latin; but the Church never recognised it as authoritative or inspired, and it gradually disappeared from sight, save for a few quotations preserved by early writers.

One of these has recently reappeared in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus of sayings of Jesus, which we shall have to mention presently.

Another early Gospel was that "according to the Egyptians," which is said to have been of a somewhat mystic and esoteric character, lending itself in some measure to unorthodox perversions. Almost the only extract from it which has come down to us records two questions by Salome, and the Lord's answers: "How long shall men be subject to death? So long as women bear children. When shall these things be made known? When ye shall tread under foot the garment of shame, and when the two shall be one, and the male with the female, neither male nor female." The ascetic tendency of these extracts is very obvious, and the difference of tone between them and the canonical Gospels is strongly marked. Another Oxyrhynchus fragment contains a variation of the second question and answer, together with words agreeing verbally with Matthew and Luke, but there is nothing to prove that it is a portion of the Gospel according to the Egyptians.

There is no other Gospel which we can refer with certainty to the first century, and even of that according to the Egyptians so early a date may be doubtful. Other writings there must have been, in order to justify the language of St. Luke's preface, but neither they nor their names have survived. Probably they disappeared early, being superseded by the fuller and more authoritative narratives which we now know as the Synoptic Gos-



pels. At the end of the first century, then, we may suppose that the Christian churches throughout the world were in possession of a few records of the Lord's life, but not of any authorised canon of Scripture. In Palestine St. Matthew's Gospel and the Gospel according to the Hebrews were the recognised authorities. In Rome, in Macedonia, and in the Greek world generally, St. Luke's work was presumably the better known. St. Mark's, the foundation of these two, was probably cast into the shade by them, and existed somewhat precariously; perhaps in Egypt, if the tradition may be trusted which states that St. Mark preached there; perhaps in Rome, since he was the representative of St. Peter's teaching. St. John's Gospel was only lately written; it was known, no doubt, in Asia Minor, possibly also in Alexandria, where its deeper philosophy would find intelligent and appreciative hearers. In Egypt, too, the speculations of the Gospel according to the Egyptians would be coming into circulation. But hitherto, no attempt had been made, so far as we know, to mark off certain books as authoritative and divinely inspired. The books themselves were still too new to be ranked on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures. The teaching of Christ was still very much a matter of tradition, of common knowledge, accepted without much dispute from preachers, the chief among whom had themselves known the Lord. The age of controversy had barely commenced, though we see its beginnings in the stories of the last years of St. John; if reference to author-

ity was needed, it could be made to the living witnesses of the Master's life, or to the intimate friends of those witnesses, instead of to books. The books were indeed in existence, and helped to stereotype the teaching; but they were not yet themselves the standard and sole repository of it.

It is the first half of the second century that constitutes the critical period in the history of the reception of the Gospels by the Church. At the beginning of the period their position is vague; during it, it is challenged by the various writings which we now call apocryphal; at the end of it, it is practically assured. During this period, moreover, we have a gradually increasing amount of evidence from other Christian writings which have survived, and which enable us to realise the progress made by the Gospels in the estimation of the Christian community. From this direct evidence, and from what we now know of the general conditions under which books circulated during this period, we can form some picture of the manner in which the Gospels were received and studied, though it would be the height of rashness to claim certainty with regard to the details of the picture. The main results of the course of evolution during this half century are clear, and have to be accounted for; but to insist that all the steps of the process are equally clear is only to risk pulling down the more certain facts to the level of the more obscure.

Let us look first at the general conditions under which books were written and circulated at this period in the lands with which we are concerned,

that is, the lands surrounding the eastern Mediterranean. Here we are on firm ground. Recent discoveries in Egypt have restored to us scores of books, and thousands of business documents and private letters, written by the Greeks who lived in that country; and we know that the Greek books produced elsewhere—in Greece itself, in Asia Minor, in Italy—did not differ materially from these. A large proportion of them were written between A.D. 50 and 200, in the very period of which we are speaking. Consequently we have before our eyes a large number of Greek books contemporary with the early copies of the Gospels; and we must remember that, for people living at the time, the Gospels were just ordinary Greek books, containing matter of supreme importance, it is true, but still produced in the same manner as the secular books of the same age. If we understand what that manner was, more than one difficulty that puzzles some people in the history of the Bible text will disappear.

Greek books at this period, and for some centuries before and afterwards, were written mainly upon papyrus, a material of about the same consistency as strong paper, made out of the pith of the papyrus plant, which grew plentifully in Egypt and was exported thence to other parts of the Roman Empire. It was manufactured in sheets (about nine inches by four would be ordinary dimensions for a medium quality), which were glued together so as to form rolls, which might be of any length up to 30 or 35 feet, but were rarely longer than this. The

style and appearance of the writing on this material varied indefinitely, from carefully and artistically written copies, in which each letter was formed separately and the result was as clear as the best modern print and a good deal more ornamental, to copies written by ignorant and unskilled private individuals in running hands as illegible as the worst modern handwritings. Writing was not an accomplishment confined to a few experts; it was very generally known and used, even though a considerable number of the common people were ignorant of it. Moreover it was not at all an uncommon thing for copies of books to be made by private individuals for their own use; and these would be written in the ordinary running hand of the day, not in the more formal and careful style of the professional scribe. Such copies might pass from hand to hand among friends, but would not ordinarily enter into the regular book trade.

These facts, about which there is no dispute, have considerable bearing on the history of the Gospels, and have unquestionably coloured the form in which they have come down to us. In the first place they show that there was no material obstacle to the circulation of the Gospels, and of other narratives of the Lord's life, among the earliest Christians. Their communities would not have lacked persons sufficiently practised in writing to make copies of the books which came into their hands, though they might not always be executed with the skill and accuracy of the trained scribe. The various churches would each have their own copies for use

in their services, and these would usually be formally and carefully written. But besides these, private individuals might also possess their own copies—a fact which was of considerable importance later, when the persecutors of Christianity turned their attention to the destruction of the sacred books; for whereas the public service books of the Church were in great danger of destruction, the private copies belonging to individuals might often escape. At the period of which we are now speaking, however, the books written by Christians were not sufficiently conspicuous to attract attention, and even when Christians were persecuted, we do not hear that their books were sought out and destroyed.

At this point, one important fact is to be observed, that the size and character of a papyrus book made it impossible for all the Christian writings to be gathered into a single volume—into a Bible such as we now possess. A roll of 30 or 35 feet, which we have seen was about the maximum consistent with convenience, written on one side only of the papyrus (and it was very rare indeed for the writing to be continued on the back), was not more than enough to contain one of the four Gospels or the Acts. It was not possible even for all the Pauline epistles to be included in a single roll. Therefore the several books which compose our New Testament circulated separately, a Gospel in one roll, a small group of epistles in another, and very few churches would at first have had complete sets of all of them. This accounts for the fact that some books, such as

the Apocalypse or the Epistle of St. James, were not known or generally received in some parts of the Christian world until a considerable time after they were written, and others, such as the Acts, seem to have circulated in slightly different forms (different editions as we should say now) in different parts of the world.

Another feature of our Bible which finds its explanation in the circumstances under which it circulated in early days is the variations of words and phrases which we find in the copies which have come down to us, the more important of which are recorded in the margins of our Revised Version, where we frequently find a note that "some ancient authorities," or "many ancient authorities," have readings more or less different from those which we read in our present texts. When all copies of books were produced by hand, the uniformity which is given by print was impossible. Different mistakes crept into different copies, and often there was not the opportunity, even if there had been the will, to revise them by comparison with more correct copies. Hence we find copies written in Egypt differing from those written in Syria, and both differing from others which were produced in Africa or Italy; and even between copies written in the same part of the world there would often be considerable discrepancies. Copies, moreover, which were written by private individuals would be less stringently accurate than those which were the work of trained scribes; and we have seen that private copies probably played an im-

portant part in the tradition of the Bible text.

Again, good material though papyrus was for writing purposes, it was not so durable as that by which it was eventually superseded, namely, parchment or vellum. Ordinary wear and tear would injure and deface its surface, so that we find in the most celebrated Christian library of early times, that of Cæsarea, it was necessary about the middle of the fourth century to renew many of the volumes which were worn out. These books could hardly have been more than 200 years old at the outside; so that the chance of any such volumes having continued to exist to our day is obviously very small indeed. Damp also is fatal to papyrus, so that lost and neglected copies would, in almost every part of the world in which the Gospels circulated, perish before long from natural decay. It is, in fact, only in Egypt, and only in the central and southern parts of that country, that the soil is sufficiently dry to preserve this perishable material. From the buried cities of Egypt a considerable number of Greek books have been recovered of late years, in a more or less fragmentary condition, and it is always possible that a very early copy of one or the other of the Gospels may some day be recovered from this source; but it is not likely that many copies of the New Testament books circulated in central or upper Egypt during the first two centuries, so that the chance of one of them being preserved and discovered is very small. It is not until the fourth century, when vellum superseded papyrus as the ma-

terial employed for the best copies of books, that manuscripts of the Gospels can fairly be looked for; and it is to this period that the two earliest complete (or substantially complete) copies of the New Testament now extant actually belong. There is thus a perfectly natural explanation of the fact, on which adverse comments are sometimes made, that no copies of the Gospels exist for nearly three hundred years after their supposed date of composition. This fact, instead of being surprising, is just what might have been expected; and it may be added that the New Testament is in a much better position, in regard to the age of the earliest witnesses to its text, than any of the great works of classical Greek and Latin literature.

These being the conditions under which books were written and circulated in the lands around the Mediterranean during the first three centuries of our era, let us now see what we know as to the actual position of the Gospels during the critical half century from A.D. 100 to 150, or, to take a slightly longer period, from A.D. 90 to 160. Our evidence upon the subject consists mainly of the extant works of the earliest Christian writers. These are very inadequate for our purpose, for various reasons. Christian literature was not very abundant during that period, when Christianity still only fluctuated between tolerance and persecution, and when comparatively few of its adherents were men of literary gifts; and of that literature only a portion has come down to us. Moreover, the habit of quoting copiously from the New Testament books had not yet



sprung up ; partly because these books had not yet obtained a position of such paramount authority as afterwards (and this is one of the points which we wish to prove), but partly also because copies from which to derive and verify quotations were not so plentiful, and partly because a considerable portion of the extant literature was addressed to pagan readers, with whom a quotation from the Gospels would carry little weight. Consequently it is natural to find that express quotations from the New Testament are far from numerous in the earliest years of our period, and increase towards the end of it.

The first of Christian writers outside the canon of the New Testament is Clement of Rome. Two epistles are extant under his name, but the second is now known to be neither an epistle, nor by him, nor of his generation. The first epistle remains unquestioned. It was written to the church of Corinth, probably between the years 93 and 95, on behalf of the Church of Rome, of which later writers asserted that Clement was bishop, though the evidence hardly amounts to certainty. In any case, bishop or not, Clement does not write as one claiming authority, but as the representative of one church which offers counsel to a sister church in its hour of difficulty. This letter is an exhortation with the Corinthian Church on its divisions, an exhortation to unity and submission to authority. It had a considerable circulation in the East, being frequently read in church ; and though it never achieved acceptance

within the canon, its position only just outside it is shown by the fact that it is found in the great Alexandrine MS. of the New Testament, following just after the Apocalypse. Until lately, this was the only known copy of the epistle; but in 1875 Archbishop Bryennios discovered another copy of it in a manuscript at Constantinople, and a translation of it was shortly afterwards found in a Syriac New Testament at Cambridge, where it is placed among the Catholic Epistles. Finally, about ten years ago, a Latin version of it was discovered in a manuscript in Belgium, showing that it was known, to some extent at least, in the West as well as in the East.

Clement quotes copiously from the Old Testament, and in a way that shows he is referring to a recognised authority. He also uses phrases from several books of the New Testament, but it is clear that these had not yet come to be regarded as inspired Scripture, on the same level as the Old Testament. Their language is merely adopted, generally without any express indication that the words of another are being used, simply as being familiar to his readers, and therefore the more effective for his purpose. The first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians is expressly referred to; phrases are quoted from several of the Pauline Epistles, and considerable use is likewise made of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the first Epistle of St. Peter, and the Epistle of St. James. With regard to the Gospels, there are two passages in which words of our Lord are quoted. Both are substantially, but not verbally, identical with passages in the Gospels as we

have them; in neither does the writer expressly state that he is quoting from published works; but in both the use of the phrase "*Remember* the words of the Lord Jesus" implies that he knew that the words must be familiar to the Corinthians, a knowledge which he could hardly have had if they were not extant in written records which he could be certain were in their possession. The passages thus quoted are, first, "Be ye merciful, and ye shall obtain mercy; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you; as ye give, so shall it be given unto you: as ye judge, so shall ye be judged: as ye are kind to others, so shall God be kind to you: with what measure ye mete, with the same shall it be measured to you again"; which may fairly be regarded as a quotation from memory of Luke vi. 36-38; and secondly, "Woe to that man! It were better for him that he had never been born, than that he should have offended one of my elect. It were better for him that a millstone should be tied about his neck, and he should be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of my little ones"; which bears a similar relation to Luke xvii. 1, 2, combined with Matt. xxvi. 24. In addition a passage is quoted from Isaiah (xxix. 13), not as it stands either in the Hebrew or the Greek, but in the form in which it appears in St. Matthew and St. Mark; which is a strong argument for supposing that Clement had before him one of these Gospels, or else the common document (if we suppose one to have existed) which was the basis of both.

The homily which passes under the name of the second epistle of Clement, and of which the only complete extant copy is that discovered by Bryennios, was evidently written about the middle of the second century. In this there are several quotations from the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, for which it would be mere perversity to seek for any other origin. They stand in every respect on the same level as the citations from the Old Testament. As a rule they are prefaced by the words "The Lord saith," but in one case we find the phrase "The Scripture saith," prefixed to an exact quotation from Matt ix. 13 ("I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"), and elsewhere "The Lord saith in the Gospel," where the words quoted ("If ye have not kept that which was little, who will give you that which is great? for I say unto you, he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much") are a version, half accurate and half inaccurate, of Luke xvi. 10, 12. There is, however, also evidence that the author of this homily used a lost Gospel; for he quotes a mysterious saying of our Lord which comes from some such source. The words are these: "The Lord Himself, being asked when His kingdom should come, said, "When the two shall be one, and that which is without as that which is within, and the male with the female, neither male nor female"; and we have seen above that this saying occurred in the lost "Gospel according to the Egyptians." The opportunity has naturally been seized by those who are unwilling to admit any early use of the canon-

cal Gospels, to argue that all the quotations in the homily are from this same work; but it is highly improbable that such extensive use would be made of a heretical work (as the Gospel according to the Egyptians is known to have been) in a perfectly orthodox homily. The natural conclusion from the evidence is that the author of this treatise was acquainted both with the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, and also with one or more narratives, such as the Gospel according to the Egyptians, which are now lost to us. The authority of the canonical four had not yet extinguished the use of other competitors.

Another work of the same period, which gained so much authority as to be appended in some early manuscripts to the books of the New Testament, is the epistle which passes under the name of Barnabas, though it does not itself claim such authorship nor can it as a matter of fact have been the work of that apostle. It was written, probably in Egypt, about the end of the first or the beginning of the second century (Harnack is inclined to fix it to A.D. 130, and a substantially later date is not possible). It contains many citations from the Old Testament, and a few passages which appear to be reminiscences of the language of St. Luke; and in one passage there is an exact quotation from St. Matthew (xxii. 14) introduced by the phrase which serves regularly to introduce citations from the Scriptures: "as it is written, There be many called, but few chosen." So long as the Epistle was known only in a Latin version, it was possible to maintain that this passage

might be an interpolation; and even since the discovery of the original Greek in the Codex Sinaiticus (published by Tischendorf in 1863) and in the Constantinople MS. published by Bryennios in 1875, some critics have been bold enough to maintain that the quotation is not from St. Matthew, but from 2 Esdras viii. 3, although the words that there occur are quite different, "Many are created, but few shall be saved," and there is no certainty that the book itself is not of later date than the Epistle of Barnabas. This is an example of the extremities of bad criticism to which some so-called "advanced" critics will go; but a simple statement of it is a sufficient refutation. There can be no doubt that to the author of the Epistle of Barnabas the Gospel of St. Matthew, at least, was approaching the position of authoritative Scripture.

The remaining works of what may be called the sub-apostolic age contain little to our purpose. The series of visions, or allegories, known as the Shepherd of Hermas, and probably written quite at the beginning of the second century, which (like the Epistle of Barnabas) is appended to the New Testament in the Codex Sinaiticus, offers practically no scriptural quotations, though there is one passage, in which the lady who typifies the Church is represented as seated on a bench, firmly standing upon four legs, as the world is compacted of four elements, which has been thought to contain an allusion to the four Gospels. The epistles of Ignatius, too—that series of ardent and emotional letters poured forth by the

Bishop of Antioch on his way to Rome about A.D. 110, which turned his journey to martyrdom into the triumphal progress of a conqueror—full of value as they are for the history of church organisation, and as a revelation of one aspect of early Christianity, yet contain comparatively few quotations, and those mostly from the Epistles of St. Paul. There are, however, a few passages which appear to be derived from the Gospels, and which may help to confirm the general impression which we obtain from other sources as to the use of the Gospels in the sub-apostolic age. “If the prayer of one or two be of such force as we are told”; “the tree is made manifest by its fruit”; “as the Lord did nothing without the Father being united to him”; “born of the virgin and baptised of John, that so all righteousness might be fulfilled by him”; “he that is able to receive this, let him receive it”; “be in all things wise as a serpent, but harmless as a dove”;—these, though in no case verbal quotations, are, on the face of them, reminiscences of the phrases in the Gospels, such as might naturally be employed by one on a journey, without ready access to books, and little likely, especially at such a time, to be solicitous for precise verbal accuracy. Finally, the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, written at the same date, contains several passages (along with a large number of quotations from the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter) for which it is almost impossible to suppose any other source than the Gospels: “Remember what the Lord has taught us, saying,

‘ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged ; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven ; be ye merciful, and ye shall obtain mercy ; for with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again ’ ; and again, ‘ Blessed are the poor, and they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.’ ” This, alike for its resemblance to the canonical texts and for its departures from it, may be compared with the similar quotation by Clement, to which reference has been made above. Another passage in Polycarp’s epistle is : “ beseeching the all-seeing God not to lead us into temptation, as the Lord hath said, ‘ The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ ” ; and there is an obvious quotation from the first Epistle of St. John (iv. 3), a book which, with regard alike to genuineness and date, cannot be separated from the fourth Gospel.

The Apology of Aristides (one of the lost works of Christianity, recovered twelve years ago) adds a little more testimony in the same direction. Composed either in A.D. 125 or between 138 and 160, according as we take it to have been addressed to Hadrian (as Eusebius states) or to Antoninus Pius (as the title of the Syriac version of it indicates), it gives an outline of Christian teaching which in no way departs from the narrative of the canonical Gospels, and it refers definitely to a written Gospel as the authority for its statements. Explicit quotations were not to be expected in a treatise addressed to a pagan emperor. Another recently recovered work, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (discovered by



Bryennios in 1875, but not published until 1883) is also assigned to about this period by most scholars, some of whom would even place it at the end of the first century. It is based upon a Jewish work, with definitely Christian additions. It contains a long quotation from the Sermon on the Mount, and gives a summary of Christian teaching which again does not necessarily point to any authority beyond our canonical Gospels. But the uncertainty as to its exact date (and one very competent English scholar, Prof. Bigg, puts it as late as the fourth century) disqualifies it as evidence for our present purpose.

The extant literature, then, of the first half of the second century, scanty as it is, points definitely to a recognition of the canonical, or at least of the synoptic, Gospels as authoritative narratives of the life of Christ. And to this may be added the testimony of an enemy of the Church, Marcion, who came to Rome about the year 140, and there founded a sect which claimed to vindicate the true spirit of Christianity by cutting it entirely free from any connection with the Jewish dispensation. Over against the canon of the Old Testament he set a canon of Christian books, consisting of the Epistles of St. Paul (without the Pastoral Epistles) and an edition, prepared by himself, of the Gospel of St. Luke. Marcion claimed to be the representative of St. Paul, and consequently the narrative which came with the authority of St. Paul's companion and biographer was naturally preferred by him; but the preference shows that the Synoptic narrative, in

one or other of its forms, was well known and recognised in Rome before the middle of the second century.

But along with the Gospels which we now recognise as canonical, there is no doubt that other narratives were still read and still produced. Some of these are known to us only by name or by a chance quotation; others have been partially restored to us by the discoveries which have been so plentiful of late years. Prominent in this latter class is the Gospel which passed under the name of Peter, of which a large fragment was published in 1892 from a manuscript discovered in Egypt. In this we have the narrative of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, based, as scholars are now generally agreed, on the four canonical Gospels, but with variations in detail betraying a strong bias against the Jews, and with marvellous additions, in a spirit quite alien to the sobriety of the canonical narratives, which do not raise our estimate of its character. It is known to have been in circulation in the last decade of the second century, and the terms in which it is then spoken of imply that it had been written at least a generation before that date. Later than 160 no one would place it, nor earlier than 100; Harnack, who is more inclined than many scholars to give it an early date, assigns it a place between 110 and 130. It appears to be a fair example of what may be called the second generation of non-canonical narratives, which are based upon the earlier and authentic records, and do not yet depart very widely from them, though they may have special tendencies in various doctrinal directions.

Another work which may probably be assigned to the same period is one of which two fragments have come to light within the last eight years. Quite at the beginning of the excavations on the site of the ancient Oxyrhynchus, in Central Egypt, undertaken on behalf of the Egyptian Exploration Fund by Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt, a single leaf of papyrus was found, containing seven sentences, to each of which was prefixed the words "Jesus saith." The interest aroused by the discovery of these sayings, which bore upon their face the stamp, if not of authenticity, at least of great antiquity, was intensified last year by the announcement that the same explorers had found, on the same site, another fragment of papyrus containing more sayings which had every appearance of being derived from the same collection. The new fragment contains five sayings, all more or less imperfect, preceded by an introductory paragraph which assigns the collection to Thomas and perhaps another apostle. This attribution of authorship reminds one of the various apocryphal works which claimed the names of Peter or Barnabas or Clement or Matthias, and suggests that the collection belongs to the second rather than the first stage of Christian literature; but there is no doubt that it contains early materials. One saying is verbally identical with Luke vi. 42: "then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote that is in thy brother's eye"; four are more or less akin to passages in St. Matthew or St. Luke, but do not agree exactly (in one case two sayings in St. Matthew are amalgamated to the distinct detriment of their

meaning); one is known to have occurred in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, of which we have spoken above; six others are non-canonical, and (like the quotation from the Gospel according to the Hebrews) are of a somewhat mystical character. The whole, whatever be its claims to authenticity (and on this point no external evidence is available, and no internal evidence can be universally convincing), is a highly interesting example of a class of literature which must (as we have already seen) have begun early in Christian circles, and continued to exist for a considerable period of time. The Oxyrhynchus fragments appear to have been written in the third century, but the character of their contents points clearly to a much earlier date for the original composition of the work contained in them. Some (including, perhaps naturally, the first editors) have been inclined to refer them even to the first century, but it is probable that the first half of the second century will ultimately be accepted as the most likely date; and they testify decisively to the existence of non-canonical records, and to an interest in them which survived long after the general acceptance of the Four Gospels.

Another Oxyrhynchus papyrus, found at the same time as the second fragment of the Sayings, gives evidence in the same direction. It is a small portion of a non-canonical Gospel, containing the substance of two or three passages from the Sermon on the Mount, and elsewhere, in different combinations. For instance: "Ye are far better than the

lilies, which grow but spin not. Having one garment, what do ye lack? . . . . The key of knowledge they hid; they entered not in themselves, and to them that were entering in they opened not. But ye, be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves." It must be admitted that the words do not gain by the new combinations in which they appear, and the whole has the semblance rather of a re-handling of the matter contained in the Synoptics, with additions from other sources, than of an independent record of the Lord's life. At the same time it is not in the least like the romances which passed under the name of Gospels in the third and later centuries, and it must rather be placed, like the Gospel according to Peter, in the second generation of non-canonical literature.

Other non-canonical works which must be assigned to the same period include the Preaching of Peter, of which a few passages only have been preserved. So far as may be judged from these, it had no narrative character, but was wholly doctrinal, consisting of discourses, some at least of which were supposed to have been delivered after the Resurrection. Clement of Alexandria (who lived about A.D. 155-215), to whom nearly all our knowledge of the book is due, cites it as if he regarded it as really the work of St. Peter; its philosophical stamp of thought, and its treatment of his favourite subject, the true knowledge of God, perhaps commended it to him. Origen, however (185-253), has no doubts as to its apocryphal nature; and there are no signs that its influence was great or its range

extensive. Indeed, its philosophical and doctrinal character would certainly tend to confine it to scholarly circles. We are indeed passing out of the class of simple narratives, which merely aimed at gathering up the scattered reminiscences of the Lord's life, or at telling the familiar story in a slightly different guise, into that of Gospels deliberately constructed with a definite doctrinal purpose by men whose opinions diverged from those of the orthodox Church. Thus different branches of the Gnostics had each their own Gospel, which passed under the name of one or other of the apostles, such as Philip, Matthias or Thomas. On these, however, it is not necessary to dwell, since they lie off the main history of the Church. As records of the life of Christ it is not likely that they ever challenged the pre-eminence of the canonical Four. They embodied the teaching of those who had definitely separated themselves from the Church, and there seems to have been no disguise about their party character.

Just at the middle of the second century we pass out of the dim mist which wraps the history of the Gospels during the first fifty years into a region of comparative light, and are able to form a fairly clear view of the position which our four Gospels had by this time assumed. We owe this to Justin Martyr, whose principal works (an *Apology* for Christianity, addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, and a *Dialogue with a Jew*, named Trypho) were written between 150 and 155. Their importance lies in the fact that Justin is the earliest author

who makes copious references to the events of our Lord's life on earth, and who must, consequently, have had before him a narrative of that life which was, at any rate, similar to that of our Gospels. From the statements and allusions in his writings it is possible to put together a complete outline of our Lord's life on earth, beginning with the Annunciation, the census of Cyrenius, the Nativity, the visit of the Magi, the flight into Egypt, the massacre of the Innocents, the return to Nazareth, and the life as a carpenter; going on with the ministry, including the chief events, both miracles and discourses, recorded in the canonical Gospels; and ending with the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension. Looking merely at the substance of the Gospel story as presented by Justin, one would say without hesitation that it is a narrative compounded out of our canonical Gospels. A few phrases alone indicate some additional source. Thus it is stated that our Lord worked as a carpenter at Nazareth, "making ploughs and yokes, emblems of righteousness," and that at His baptism a fire was kindled on the Jordan; twice reference is made to the Acts of Pontius Pilate, as confirming some statement; and twice sayings of our Lord are quoted, which are not in our four Gospels. This is the extent of the divergence; and Professor Sanday is evidently within the mark when he says that if Justin used only a Gospel different from those known to us, it must have differed from the three synoptists less than they differ from each other.

Thirty years ago many of the leading critics, es-

pecially in Germany, whose whole view of early Church history rested on the position that the canonical Gospels were not written until after the middle of the second century, maintained that Justin did not use our Synoptic Gospels, but the common document which underlies them. Such a plea was made possible by the rather high rate of verbal variation between the canonical texts and the corresponding passages in Justin; but it was proved untenable on its own merits by the fact, which can be established beyond cavil, that Justin constantly follows the individual narratives of Matthew, Mark, or Luke, and not the common underlying narrative. Now that the first century date of the Synoptic Gospels is conceded by all responsible scholars, no one would care to dispute the natural conclusion, that Justin knew at least these three narratives, and made them the basis of his own story. The variations from the synoptic narrative admit of an explanation quite in accordance with the circumstances which have been outlined above. Justin may very naturally have been indifferent to exactitude of quotation, since he was telling the story in his own way, not explicitly as a quotation from one or the other Evangelist. Literary exactness, as we have seen, was not likely to be strictly required at this period. But also Justin may well have known other narratives of the Lord's life, more or less independent of the canonical Four, such as the Gospel according to the Hebrews, or that to which the Oxyrhynchus fragment belongs. From these he may have taken the few incidents which are not



to be found in the canonical Gospels. Much use, however, he cannot have made of any other narrative, unless that narrative was so closely akin to that of our Synoptists as to amount to little else than a paraphrase of it.

With this evidence of Justin's in our hands, we are in a position to sum up the conditions in which the Gospels stood about the middle of the second century; and it must be remembered that the evidence of any writer in such a matter as this casts back a reflected light over the period before that at which he actually put pen to paper. We have by this time clear evidence of the existence of our four canonical Gospels—fullest in the case of the first and third Gospels, less full in that of the second and fourth, because St. Mark's was naturally obscured by the ampler narratives of the other Synoptists, and St. John's was at once the latest to be written and the most difficult of comprehension. Side by side with these we have the evidence of the existence of a number of other Gospels, the earlier ones being narratives of the same general stamp and intention as the Synoptic narratives—simple records of events and discourses in our Lord's life—while the later ones more and more reflect the special views of special groups in or on the borders of the Church. Also there are collections of sayings, drawn for the most part, in all probability, from the narratives, but possibly embodying also the relics of oral tradition. All these are more or less available to the individual Christian, according to the place in which he lives and the society by which he is sur-

rounded. Each book has its own independent circulation as a separate work, and some are better known in one country, some in another. But the possession of books is not necessarily confined to the few. Writing, though not a universal accomplishment, is yet very general, and it is quite a common practice for private individuals to make rough copies of books for their personal use. Consequently in each Christian community it is probable that a small library existed, both for private study and, increasingly as the literature of Christianity came more and more to assume the rank of sacred Scripture, for public service. But among this Christian literature, throughout the half-century of which we have been speaking, the four books which now we call the canonical Gospels were more and more assuming the foremost place. More and more the sense and instinct of the Church was coming to recognise that in them, more fully and more truly than could be said of any of their competitors, was contained the true record of the Master's life upon earth, the true indication of the message of salvation which He had brought to mankind.

The clinching proof of the supremacy of the four Gospels comes a few years later than the time of Justin, and in the person of one of his disciples. Tatian, a native of Assyria, was born about the year 110. He was converted to Christianity by Justin, and probably wrote his *Apology for Christianity* not long after that of his master. He resided in Rome until Justin's martyrdom, but about 170 he retired both from Rome and from the ortho-

dox Church, establishing in Syria a community of ascetic tendencies, not indeed contrary to Christianity or hostile to it, but representing a special development of one side of its truth, to the exclusion or neglect of others. It may have been after this date or it may have been before that he compiled a single narrative of the life of Christ, which went by the name of "Diatessaron," a musical term meaning the harmony of four notes. Since it was especially in Syria that this work subsequently circulated, and all its connections are pre-eminently Syrian in character it is perhaps most probable that it was composed in that country, after Tatian's withdrawal from Rome, *i.e.* between 170 and 180, when he died; though it is quite possible that it was composed in Rome and carried with him subsequently into Syria.

Now the importance of this work lies in the fact that, as its title indicates, it was a "harmony of four"; but until some thirty years ago the work itself was believed to be lost, and controversialists anxious to bring down the date of the canonical Gospels as late as possible denied the obvious interpretation of the name as a harmony of the four Gospels. A series of interesting discoveries has shattered their arguments. In 1876 was published a Latin translation of an Armenian version of the works of St. Ephraem of Syria, among which was a commentary on the Diatessaron. The Armenian version had in fact been printed at Venice as long ago as 1836; but in the general ignorance of the Armenian language in the West it passed unnoticed. Even the Latin translation was not effectually noticed until 1880;

but when at last an American scholar, Dr. Ezra Abbot, called attention to it, its immense importance was manifest, since it demonstrated that Tatian's Diatessaron was in fact, as orthodox critics had contended, a harmony of our four canonical Gospels. Subsequently two Arabic translations of the Diatessaron itself came to light, one at Rome and the other in Egypt, which were published in 1888; and it was then further discovered that a Latin version of it had all the time been in existence in the shape of a harmony of the Gospels which Bishop Victor of Capua had published in A.D. 545.

We have therefore this fact established now beyond cavil, that at a date not later than A.D. 175, and possibly as early as 160, the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were welded together into a single narrative. This implies, not merely that they existed before this date, but that by this date they were generally recognised as the four authorities for the life of our Lord. If it had been only a harmony of the three Synoptic Gospels, it might have been said that it was simply an amalgamation of those narratives which ultimately rested upon a common basis; but the inclusion of a work so different in tone and style, and with so different a selection of incidents, as the Fourth Gospel, shows that the basis of selection was that of recognised authority. And that recognition must have been establishing itself for many years before the moment when Tatian, so to speak, embodied it in his harmony. Tatian's recognition carries with it and confirms that of his

master, Justin, and practically establishes it for the Roman church by at least the middle of the second century.

A similar conclusion might be reached on independent lines, from a consideration of the history of the earliest Latin version of the New Testament. The general opinion of textual critics on this point is that the translation was probably made in the first instance in North Africa (where there was a large Latin-speaking population), certainly before the end of the second century, when Tertullian mentions its existence, and probably not much later than A.D. 150. If, then, the Gospels were translated into other languages by this time, their pre-eminent authority must have been recognised; for we do not hear of any of their competitors being thus translated until a much later period, when Jerome himself made a Latin version of the Gospel according to the Hebrews. It is not necessary, however, to labour the point, since the evidence of Tatian's Diatessaron is more precise and explicit.

Lastly, to make assurance doubly sure, we may quote Irenaeus. Until recently the writings of this Father were the fixed point on which the Christian apologist based his proof of the early existence of the Gospels, and from which he worked backwards through the obscure parts of the second century; and although we can now rely on the earlier evidence of Tatian, and through Tatian on that of Justin, the testimony of Irenaeus is still valuable for the proof it gives of the absolutely commanding position secured by the canonical books by the

time at which he wrote. His principal work was written between 181 and 189; and the strength of his evidence is intensified by the fact that he had been the disciple of Polycarp, who had himself listened to St. John and to several of the "elders" who had known the Lord. Of the tendency of the evidence there is no possible doubt. Not only does he quote repeatedly from the four Gospels. (Prof. Sanday has estimated that he quotes directly 193 verses from the first Gospel and 73 from the fourth); but the existence of four Gospels and no more is with him an axiom of nature, for which he finds many fantastic parallels. With the attainment of this position we may fairly leave them.

It is not, of course, to be supposed that the supremacy of the canonical Gospels implied the entire and immediate extinction of all competitors. On the contrary, the non-canonical literature continued to have a certain circulation for a considerable period. During the actual life-time of Irenaeus, in the last decade of the second century, a bishop of Antioch found the Gospel of Peter in circulation in an outlying part of his diocese. Believing it, on first inspection, to contain no erroneous doctrine, he sanctioned its use, but withdrew his sanction on discovering that it emanated from the sect of heretics known as Docetæ, who denied the reality of our Lord's human body. This anecdote illustrates the attitude of the authorities of the Church towards the literature which lay outside the circle, now gradually attaining definition, of the books recognised as inspired. It could not be regarded as authoritative;

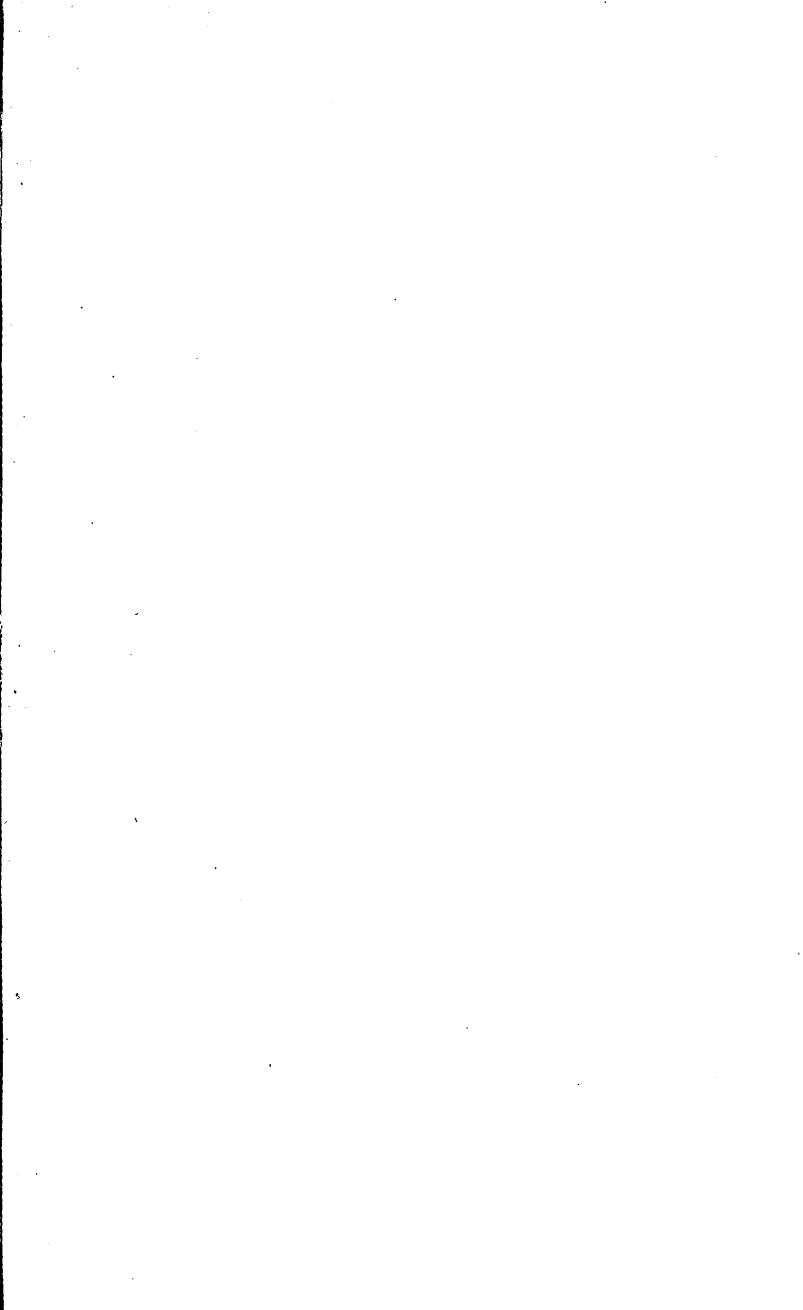
but if it contained nothing inconsistent with the inspired books, there was no reason why it should not be read for edification. Even when not sanctioned, it did not necessarily incur destruction. The fragment which now survives of the Gospel of Peter was transcribed in Egypt about the sixth century; and it was accompanied by an extract from two other apocryphal books, the Apocalypse of Peter and the book of Enoch.

Similar evidence is attainable in the case of other non-canonical writings. The Oxyrhynchus collection of Sayings, and the fragment of a non-canonical Gospel, were written in the third century. During the same period Origen refers to the existence of the Gospel according to the Egyptians, the Gospel of the Twelve, the Gospels according to Thomas and Matthias and Basilides, and many more, adding that the Church selects the four (canonical) Gospels and those alone. In the fourth century the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas were appended to the canonical books in the great Sinaitic manuscript of the Greek Bible; just as, in the fifth century, the epistles of Clement and the Psalms of Solomon were included in the Codex Alexandrinus. At the same time a whole class of sacred romances, the antidote of the secular novels of the period, sprang up in the shape of apocryphal acts of the various apostles. But none of these disturbed the authority of the canonical books. Their position had been secured ever since the Christian community had been led—had been divinely inspired, a Christian will prefer to say—to select them out

of all their competitors during the first half of the second century.

In conclusion, it may be interesting to point out how much of the evidence with which we have been dealing in this enquiry has only become available during quite recent years. The Diatessaron of Tatian, the Gospel of Peter, the Apology of Aristides, the Teaching of the Apostles, the end of the so-called Second Epistle of Clement, the Oxyrhynchus "Sayings" and non-canonical Gospel fragment—all of these have come to light within the last thirty years. And of all, so far as they have borne upon the question at all, the tendency has been the same—to confirm the traditional view of the date and authority of our Gospels. The traditional view had been hotly assailed by the searching historical criticism which, for good or for evil (and certainly very largely for good) has beaten upon the Christian records during the last sixty years, as it has upon all other departments of human knowledge; and although the great defenders of that tradition made good their case with the materials which already lay to their hands, it is a striking fact that witness after witness has risen, as it were, from the grave to testify that they were right. The historical critic will accept the new evidence and record it, after the searching examination which it requires, with that loyal obedience to the established fact which is characteristic of the best criticism of the day; but the Christian student is entitled to go one step further, and to say: "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."







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